**[00:00:08.490] - Speaker 1**

Question.

**[00:00:14.290] - Speaker 2**

So tell me what your name is, and you can also tell me your position, courage, position in the geneticism fraternity, and just basically what you've done as a journalist.

**[00:00:29.490] - Speaker 1**

Okay. My name is Joe Shiru. I'm a journalist of how many years is that now? About 20 years. I started off my career as a radio journalist, and then a year later, I migrated into print to work for The Post newspaper, where I was until 2016, when the newspaper was liquidated. And by that time, I was managing editor. Currently, I'm currently founder of the Free Press Initiative, and I'm also executive director for the organization, which is a nonprofit organization that is charged with functions of advocating for press freedom. We also do a lot of training and retraining of journalists, which is one of our core functions, and we also defend human rights because we believe these things are interrelated. When we talk about freedom, there's some human rights attached to that. And we also felt this would be a good time for us to go in hazy with the training and retraining of journalists because times are changing, and there are quite a number of new things that are coming up digital journalism and also having social media taking up much of the space that traditional journalists held. So you have that mix where at times, people really don't even know how to differentiate between those that exist online as citizen journalists and the trained ones.

**[00:02:28.990] - Speaker 1**

And in the end, you find that even the traditional ones are slowly forgetting their core functions and begin to do certain things that are outside what you would expect of a trend journalist. For instance, when we talk about issues of media ethics, I think that's one other critical area that we've been looking at where at least maybe three or four times in a year we do have gatherings where we bring together, senior generalists and editors, as well as gatekeepers who have to be reminded of the need or the importance of keeping so close our ethics as journalists whenever we are carrying out our duties so briefly. That's what I can say about myself and what I am doing now. Okay.

**[00:03:20.370] - Speaker 2**

Have you faced any obstacles in your reporting as a geneticist, let's say maybe laws that have restricted genitalists from flourishing, from publishing news that they need to publish, just basically for journalists to practice in our country? What are some of those obstacles?

**[00:03:40.730] - Speaker 1**

Yeah. So have I faced any obstacles in my practice of journalism because maybe the laws that are existing that impede on the freedom of the press? Yes, I have. Not on one occasion or two occasions, but several occasions, and I think one of the major ones being an arrest for defamation of the president. That was in 2016, and that time I was managing editor of The Post newspaper. We had published a story about months earlier, we had published a story about the president, Edgar Lunguden, who had gone to Fui for a holiday a couple of weeks after his election. And the story was to the effect that he went tom foyer to play pool and the police took that as something that was defamatory against the President at that time. The question of whether anybody would think of it in that way and even come up with a charge is still something that's laughable to this day because we had evidence to the effect that the President was actually playing pool while there. So all those issues actually arose. But unfortunately, that's a case that's still hanging off our heads and we have not been cleared by the courts.

**[00:05:08.730] - Speaker 1**

We are not sure whether it's going to come up again. There hasn't been any communication. After a few appearances in courts, we only went as far as appearing for mention. The matter did not proceed to trial or anything because I think if it had gotten to trial then it would have been a really interesting case to patch holes in because I don't see anything defamatory about a story that talks about someone engaging in some form of a game and there's even evidence to that effect. So it's one of those laughable things that when you look back, you actually see how horrible some of the laws that are still existing in our country or still existed that time had been impeding on media freedom and the smooth operations of journalists in our country. Apart from that, of course, before I move away from the defamation of the President part, we know that now it's no longer always been taken out of the penal code after a revision. And that came out of some political will from the presidency where he said it didn't need to exist anymore because he believes that that freedom needs to exist in a country.

**[00:06:30.510] - Speaker 1**

I also had quite a number of summons where you're summoned at the police to appear for questioning, warn and cautioned statements taken from some of the stories that were published by the Post newspapers. And out of the bulk of those summons and the warn and cautioned statements that were recorded, there is nothing that ever proceeded. The only one was the defamation of the President arrest, but the rest just ended at one uncautioned statement. And it boils down to how respective jurisdictions in most of Africa have been utilizing these laws to try and impede on the free practice of journalism because they expect you to have some sort of fear when they do that. So you are afraid to keep appearing at the police every other time you are quoted the police, you are questioned for this and that and

you're talking hours, maybe two, 3 hours of you being with the police where they're quizzing you about this and that and the one on caution statement is recorded. So ultimately, those that are not ready for what happens when you dedicate yourself to such kind of a job, they tend to give up and they begin to bury stories because they are afraid of some of those things that happen.

**[00:07:57.130] - Speaker 1**

So it's one of those things that have been happening, of course, not only to me, but it's several other journalists that have been through this path can speak of the similar issues. But of course, not to forget the fact that it was quite rough the time that we were at the post and the post was existing. And unfortunately, I was one of those that had a fair share of those summons and appearances at the police, which ultimately led to some arrest at some point and having to appear in court. And like I mentioned, we still have a criminal tag on our backs and nobody knows exactly when that is going to be taken out because the law requires that appropriate steps are taken for someone to be cleared of whatever charges they've been lamped with. And let's not forget this is a criminal charge. Our fingerprints were taken and mug shorts taken. So those are still existing and they know that we have that criminal matter that's still in the courts. So what should happen is the matter has to be called in court, and then an application has to be made by the state to say they are discontinuing with the matter for either lack of proper evidence or whatever it is, so that now the court can discharge us via an acquittal, because then we all know there isn't any case there.

**[00:09:28.500] - Speaker 1**

So that's what has to happen. But everyone is quiet. Nobody knows what's going to happen next. So that's where we are.

**[00:09:37.870] - Speaker 2**

Okay, having gone through such kind of intimidation with the police and partner to been to court, has that changed the way you approach work as a geneticist?

**[00:09:50.740] - Speaker 1**

I know you still well, no, it has not. It's actually part of the motivation behind the organization that I started, which is the Free Press Initiative, because what we want to do is to support as many generatives as possible, and especially the young ones, because that's been our focus. To try and show them that you still can practice and exist without having to worry about some of these things that are existing or some of the threats that may come from whichever angle. So it's given me a lot more energy to try and look at things in a different way and see how best we can bridge the gap that has been existing in terms of

providing support to the young journalists to become resilient and really strong journalists. Because it's through that that we will be able to play a critical role in a democracy as a fourth estate. The other thing that you may want to know is that the experiences that I went through also pushed me to do something totally different from what I had been doing, which is to study law. And I finished the first part of it and right now I'm actually at the Zambia Institute of Advanced Legal Education where we sit for bar exams.

**[00:11:28.790] - Speaker 1**

So I have a few more months to go before I can hopefully get admitted to the bar and become an advocate of the High Court. And what that will do is that it will give me power to stand in any court for our country and represent any journalists who may have an issue. And I'll be given audience because then I'll be an advocate of the High Court. So all that has really been motivated by what I went through. I recall how our organization would accumulate huge legal bills out of all these things that we were going through, the summons and whatnot. But then what do I want to do once I am done? My point is, I'm trying to see when that time comes and I'm admitted to the bar as an advocate of the High Court, then I can offer my services pro bono to a number of journalists that have no capacity whatsoever to pay legal bill, because legal services are not cheap in our country and everywhere else. So that is really what I have tried to do. So my journey into the law field has got nothing to do with any motivation with regard to money and whatnot, but only to offer a service, an extended service beyond the journalism circles, because we are in many times coming into conflict with a law, not because what we are doing is illegal, but because somebody has come up with laws that are restricting the practice of genetism.

**[00:13:07.610] - Speaker 2**

Okay, how do you feel about genetism, having had over 20 years of practice? When you look at it then and then now, what has changed about geneticism?

**[00:13:20.660] - Speaker 1**

Well, what has changed about journalism between then when I just started and now? Quite a lot. There's quite a lot that has happened. I had made brief reference to where we are now with regard to the existence of social media, the digital space. Yes. And also when you look at the Zambian media industry, I always make reference to the fact that things took a different turn with the death of the post. Of course, we all know the role that the post played in the journalism industry. When it comes to employment, it was one of the largest employers. When it comes to independence, I think it was one of the most independent and quite forceful. Now, from nowhere, you wake up, you discover that that particular organization is normal. So it left a huge gap. The only big ones that are still existing are government controlled, like state owned and government controlled media organizations. But we all know what happens to the same organizations. You don't expect an independence

day. Yeah, it's almost impossible to get independent reporting in a government controlled media. So that gap that was left has seen the few that came up limping through the way trying to provide what was being provided by the post then.

**[00:15:16.730] - Speaker 1**

And along the way we have seen quite a number of journalists. That those that have not been able to find their space in the independent organizations that can swallow them up, having to practice certain type of journalism that leaves them extremely vulnerable and in the long run, that has been eating into ethics. Which takes me to something that I had talked about earlier. So there are so many questions of ethics that come up and where some of the people that actually are even far from the industry begin to raise issues of whether certain conduct is something that's acceptable, is something that's ethical, because they believe certain things that are done by the genetics should actually not be done, which is very correct. So it has left us with a lot of wake. There's just so much to be done apart from the training part where now everything seems to be too fast and nobody is paying a lot of attention to detail because they want to be number one, face to break the story and number two, they want to grow the numbers because they're also existing online. The quality of the work being done gets compromised.

**[00:16:32.050] - Speaker 1**

So issues of professionalism and capacity also come into play. But then I would say that's the reason why we're existing. We are not complaining that we have that problem. I always say the best is yes, a problem has been identified but then what solution are you going to offer? So the Free Press Initiative has been trying to offer that particular solution and what are we doing? We have recognized the existence of citizen journalists that are mostly existing digitally by bringing them on board whenever we are having our trainings. So when for instance, we're having a training in media ethics they are not left out. We identify the key ones and let them be a part of whatever trainings we're having trainings in investigative reporting, they need to also get the basics what exactly is involved in journalism? They have showed that they want to do this. We cannot knock them out because social media and all these other platforms are here to stay. So the only thing we can do is to try and find ways in which we can balance up and exist with them. So that's what we have done. We've embraced everybody and the organization itself is actually not membership driven, it's a non member organization so we work with any genetics.

**[00:17:55.990] - Speaker 1**

We're trying to avoid the membership part because at times it creates problems along the way where those that fewer members, I mean those that are members few, they are more entitled to whatever you are doing when it shouldn't be the case. So we want to be as open as possible and work with as many of our colleagues in the industry as possible without any

restrictions. So of course there are some gaps and what was there then or what used to happen then is not what is happening now, but not to say that what is happening now should be thrown out completely. I think there are some good things that are being done. For instance, life has been made easier by all these technological advancements where you can do your research, you can do your investigation online. Unlike those days during our time when if I'm investigating a story that involves me going to the Patents and Companies Registration Agency, I have to physically go there. Either you walk or you have to look for transportation to get there and collect whatever you need. And then not forgetting also the long queues that you will find there before you attended to, you would have lost maybe 2 hours or so.

**[00:19:06.990] - Speaker 1**

But right now everything is existing online. You can do your search of whatever company online via the Patents and Companies Registration Agency portal. So you just log in and you get everything else that you need. Life made Easy so with some of the negatives pointed out in terms of the then and now, there are also some positives that I am making reference to with regard to some things being made easy. But while we have these things that have been simplified, for instance, to enable us to awake in a much easier way, of course it's a move toward a shift towards digitalization of everything else that exists, but it's also working to our advantage as journalists. There's still a little bit of work that needs to be done. Because some journalists don't even know that some of those things exist, or others may know they exist, but because they just feel lazy to go all out and do a story and make sure that it's got all the value that it needs for it to be called a story, all the elements of a good story answered in that particular piece. They will just still continue having what I always refer to as trash being pushed to the public, which is really unacceptable.

**[00:20:29.230] - Speaker 1**

But again, there's another big elephant in the room that has been behind the maybe we say laziness that we see among some of the journalists existing now, and that is poor remuneration. So the first question these journalists who ask themselves is, is it worth it for me to spend two, three, 4 hours, maybe even a week or maybe two months pushing this story? Spend a little more of my own? Resources to get this story out when I'm only being given penis or when I'm not even being given anything of the same penis that have been offered. Where I go, maybe in four or five months, I'm not getting paid. Half the time the journalists will be going around finding other alternative sources of income for their own survival. Already the cost of living in the city has skyrocketed. It's quite high. It's about three no, not even three times. I think it's about almost five times more what an average geneticist gets. So when you look at that, it tells you of the realities of why we are where we are. Why are we where we are? It's because somebody has been forgotten, the newsroom has been forgotten.

**[00:21:56.230] - Speaker 1**

Those that have got the power and the money and the resources to run media businesses, some of them, not all of them, some of them, their focus is only the making of the money. But they are forgetting that the money is coming because it's called a media house and a lot of people are interested in news. They've just completely forgotten the newsroom. Things are not the way they were. The few that understand the variables with the media business are very too small and they don't have capacity to swallow everybody. So you find it's a newspaper that has only existed for a few years, but then it can take only as much, it can take everybody. If it was in their power, obviously they could swallow up everybody, but they are not able to. And those are the only ones that are managing to pay decent wages. What about the rest? It's slave wages and what do you get out of a slave wage? It's the same trash that I was talking about. So it's a cycle really. How we sort this out is by looking at both sides of the coin. While we are trying to push and ensure that there's professionalism and the capacities of journalists in his, we are also trying to begin to speak up and change the narrative.

**[00:23:13.110] - Speaker 1**

And this is a project that the FBI has already started where we've been having meetings with owners of media organizations to speak openly about some of these things and make them understand that a journalist is an important and extremely important staff member of their companies.

**[00:23:37.750] - Speaker 2**

Thank you. The interview continues. There are certain topics that are restricted in this country. Maybe if we just name some of the topics as a general, some of the topics, you find that when you report on this you'll be intimidated. There will be all these salmons coming your way. What are some of those topics.

**[00:24:05.470] - Speaker 1**

And.

**[00:24:05.810] - Speaker 2**

Have you covered those topics?

**[00:24:08.750] - Speaker 1**

Well, some topics that are restricted and reporting on them gets you some consequences, if I may put it that way. For me, really, I think it's been issues of corruption. Not that nobody

wants you to report on them, but because they are quite sensitive and it mostly involved involves the powerful, corruption involves the powerful and the powerful have a means through which they try to intimidate because they control most of the institutions. So a powerful person is capable of controlling the police, capable of controlling even the courts and all the other institutions of the law. So that's been one of those things really, where some of those powerful will come with threats, for instance, or certain offers. So their story should not be done, but of course, you know how the posts never entertained or tolerated things like that. So nobody ever had their way when it came to that. And of course we were a strong institution with a lot of backing, legal backing and strong lawyers. So anything else that was being done, we made sure that it had gone through appropriate stages and free of any legal issues that could warrant somebody taking out a lawsuit against the institution or an individual generally.

**[00:25:56.620] - Speaker 1**

So it would always be mayor threats and whatnot. And then when they discover that you are not backing down, of course they have to just swallow a bit of you and find other means in which they can try to discredit but then you know how credible the organization was and that's a good thing when you are running a credible organization. So people believe you and they'll not believe their stories. But right now where we are, of course, yes, some of those issues of corruption have continued but sadly it's not being told in the way it should be. There's been quite a lot of self censorship going on where so much is being swept under the carpet by the journalists because of fear at times. It's fear of all the things that I mentioned earlier where you're not just ready, you're not ready to go all out fighting the powerful. You're also not ready to face certain consequences, especially if it involves somebody that's so powerful with connections with the government where they can influence maybe closure of your organization or withdraw of your broadcast license if your existence is dependent on licensing, like radio, television.

**[00:27:13.210] - Speaker 1**

So it's a little worrying really that some of those things still do happen and generalists are sort of afraid. Then the other subject that is quite sensitive and touches on the social lives of the people is, I think the gay, right? It's quite a hot topic that a lot of journalists find it so hard and difficult to even venture there. Some of them decide not to do that maybe because of their own personal beliefs and they choose not to write anything about it. Or others are afraid because you might be summoned by the police to explain certain things and probably even where they will push you to disclose some of the sources because you might have probably protected your sources by giving them pseudonyms. But they will summon you so you can tell them, who is this person? Because our laws prohibit the practice of homosexuality. And of course, it's quite wide and there are all the other pieces and bits in the same law when it comes to the same and how it constitutes an offense. So it's just not

by mayor maybe me being identified, of me portraying myself as one who is into the practice but there has to be proof that I am actually into it and somebody will have to be ready to tender that particular piece of evidence so it's pretty wide.

**[00:29:03.480] - Speaker 1**

But it's also something that really scares the journalists and they really are afraid of talking about it. And even media organizations actually like, you have this story, but then some of them will just say, you know what, no, let's just put this on the side. I think it's not a story worth getting into. And then in the end, certain rights are being ignored because some of these things, I think the basis talk about them because those are realities, they're happening and people are being intimidated and threatened. So it's a sensitive topic. So I will point to those two in responding to your story. Thank you.

**[00:29:46.110] - Speaker 2**

Are there any topics that are off limits for journalists in this country?

**[00:29:51.790] - Speaker 1**

Any topics that are off limits for journalists? I don't think there are any. Really? Even the ones that I mentioned, they touch on them, but it's about maybe just somebody's feeling like, okay, no, I shouldn't just do this, but not necessarily that they are off limits and somebody or maybe a law has said you should not report on this. No. So journalists are free to report on anything else as long as it's newsworthy and there's public interest involved. So it's all about them recognizing that, yes, this is a story and it has to be taught. Then they tell that story, of course, taking into account all other issues that come into play when it comes to ethical conduct, when collecting the story and even packaging and dissemination of the story. Okay.

**[00:30:51.150] - Speaker 2**

Why do you think press freedom is restricted in this country and what is contributing to that? We get back to press freedom.

**[00:30:57.870] - Speaker 1**

Press freedom? Yeah. Why press freedom is restricted and why is contributing to it? Well, when you look at the trend and some of the laws that have been around, you discover that these are really old, odd pieces of law. I talked about the defamation of the President, which thankfully is no longer in the statute. It's not law anymore. There are some that are really orders, like the sedition laws. We have the criminal defamation laws, we have the State Security Act, we have quite a lot. And sadly, we also had a law that was recently passed that also touches on freedom of the press, which is a Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act. While

we were busy advocating for a repeal of a number of those laws that are inhibiting the free practice of journalism, then somebody wakes up and decides where we're going to come up with this. Not that it's entirely bad, but there are certain provisions in that particular law that are anti press freedom and so much anti investigative reporting, to be specific, where a law enforcer is entitled to go to anybody, even a journalist, and get information about who they've been talking to.

**[00:32:50.440] - Speaker 1**

And yeah, so those are things that we had talked about earlier before it was enacted, before the bill was enacted. But nobody was ready to listen. And as we speak, it's actually a subject of review. The matter is in courts. I wouldn't really delve so much into it, but civil society organizations and the one that is leading on that is Chapter One Foundation, which we collaborate with, challenged the same enactment of the Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act in relation to how it's violating the provisions of the Constitution with regard to freedom of expression, for instance. So right now there is a bill that has already been approved by Cabinet that is looking into a revision of this same law. So hopefully everything gets sorted out because as things stand, I think there has to be a movement in court where this matter that was taken with regard to the challenge of the law is discontinued. So that now the discussions around the amendment of the bill can begin and obviously, ultimately we can reach a point where that revision now is going to work to the advantage of everybody. So yeah, there are those laws that I talked about which impede on press freedom and the other part actually comes from the business interests, which is an aspect that we mostly ignore.

**[00:34:53.120] - Speaker 1**

But I would tell you that it's got a very big influence on the practice of journalism because a number of times you'll find that someone will be running a media platform that has been fully funded by a business executive with control of a number of things. Now, if you have a story that needs to be taught and it touches on some of the interests of that big business person, I think you all know the answer. It will not be taught. So what does that mean? It means the freedom that the journalist is supposed to enjoy will not exist. So it's not only from the bad laws that are existing, but it's also coming from some of those interests that are usually veiled and mostly unknown at times. It also comes from those in control of political power. They will have maybe registrations or television stations and some publications here and there. So their existence may be for a sole purpose of saving their own agendas, obviously, which is quite critical. So it's the same thing of having to protect anything else around them because there is no way you will report on something that is negative about somebody that's keeping you going.

**[00:36:34.220] - Speaker 1**

You cannot bite a finger that feeds you. They say the moment you do, then that finger will not feed you anymore. So when I am talking about the existence or nonexistence of press freedom in Zambia, I always look at those two sides of it so that we clearly understand and know that it's not just one sided, it actually comes from both sides. And this is what has led us to what we always talk about now, which is polarization of the media. It's highly polarized now, such that even in newsrooms it's not strange to. Know that, well, this is where this one belongs. And your conduct or how you even write stories is even so clear, that becomes a problem. But if I can have a certain inclination, politically or otherwise, but my conduct is nowhere near the interest that I have, then I'm maintaining my professionalism and I'm doing what needs to be done. But mostly that's not the case. So that's quite worrying and why we have that. Of course I partly explained that where now it's about protection of people's interests and their own personal agendas. And when it comes to the laws, of course they know how powerful journalists are, they know how powerful the media is.

**[00:38:15.940] - Speaker 1**

So they have to find ways in which you're not given all the freedom that you need to operate, so they can still have some control over what you do, so that they can have that fear instilled in you. Where when you look over your shoulder, there is something that's reminding you that hey, when you cross this line, we will come for you. I'll give an example of how registrations and TV stations operate by license and regulated by the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act. So on several occasions you've heard stories of registrations having their licenses withdrawn or TV stations having their licenses withdrawn. Some of those withdrawals have nothing to do with proper violations, I would say, of the act, but just because there's a certain line which they crossed that has been created by the powerful that they wouldn't want the genetics to cross. Not because what they did was illegal, not at all, but because they could have just stepped on somebody's foot and they were uncomfortable with it. And the only route they could take is to ensure that you do not exist anymore via those laws. So there are already all those things that are existing really and impeding on the free practice of journalism in Zambia.

**[00:39:46.320] - Speaker 1**

And that's the reason why I have always contended and argued that at this point the journalists in Zambia do not need any laws to regulate them because there are already more than enough laws where now we are saying we should actually get some of these laws out. So the discourse going around right now about statutory regulation of the journalists, which is actually coming up with more laws, is something that I personally, a student of law and a leonard legal practitioner of the law, is saying it's a dangerous path to take if you are not ready to listen to that. But the truth is you cannot continue coming up with laws to regulate the practice of journalism. Let people exist. What we need is self regulation and it has worked very well already. But the argument that we should regulate the journalists because

there are some who pose as journalists, so we don't want them to continue posing as journalists. That will not cure the deficiency that we have in the industry right now. You can come up with even ten models, but you will still continue having the same problems. How we will sort out what we are seeing now is by doing what I was talking about, looking at remuneration of Genesis, ensuring that we are constantly checking and bridging the gap and finding solutions collectively of what are the most immediate needs of the newsrooms of the individual genetics, if possible, so we can help them out.

**[00:41:19.370] - Speaker 1**

That's how it will work. It will not work via coming up with more laws. No, we already have a lot which are chalking the industry. So why do we need more?

**[00:41:29.470] - Speaker 2**

Okay, I know you've touched a bit on this, but I should be able to ask this question. What do you see as the consequence of restricting press freedom and how does that make journalists lose in terms of their wake?

**[00:41:52.770] - Speaker 1**

You can post for me. Hello, Panama. From Sheila. Which you okay. Access to information. Okay, let me call you in the next 2030 minutes. Yeah? Okay, thanks. Let's talk in 30 minutes then we can see our best. We handle it. All right, thanks. Okay.

**[00:43:09.010] - Speaker 2**

Not a question.

**[00:43:13.820] - Speaker 1**

Yes.

**[00:43:14.240] - Speaker 2**

The question was what do you see as the consequences of restricting press freedom and how does that make journalists lose?

**[00:43:23.840] - Speaker 1**

So the consequences of restricting press freedom and the loss that may be occasioned for the genetics as a result. Yeah, you know, there is so much power within the genitalists that even the journalists themselves actually don't realize we collect quite a lot of information and also we disseminate that information. But like I mentioned a number of times, there will

be somebody who is not comfortable with whatever information that we have, whether we have disseminated already or we have collected. So they will try as much as possible to ensure that that is not taken out. So what happens is restricting the freedom to collect and disseminate information, now it's into, number one, the standing of the profession itself, because then why should I continue existing if I'm not going to be allowed to freely do what I should do? So I guess you may actually be called something else and not a journalist if there's going to be someone who will tell you how you ought to collect information, how you ought to package it and also disseminate it. Because what makes you as a journalist is to have that freedom to do all those things without anybody hindering you at all.

**[00:45:19.010] - Speaker 1**

Because then you would have done what you need to be done, I mean, what needs to be done. And you would have played a key role in informing the people without having to sweep anything under the carpet for the citizens. What that entails is they will not be adequately informed. So there will be so many things going on, but then you will not know about them. Some of them that may actually require you to make certain decisions about, but because that information has not been passed on then you end up maybe making wrong decisions. I can even give an example of maybe someone sitting on a story to do with expired medicines. You can imagine the effect on the citizen where you are not aware. But then there is this genus that has that information but has been intimidated and threatened and they decide I'm not going to do this to all then about of our citizens take those expired medicines unknowingly. They get sick out of it. Maybe some of them even lose their lives. So the threats associated with us not being very free to communicate what we have and do the stories that can be unsettling to others quite grave.

**[00:46:42.760] - Speaker 1**

And our job really is all about service. I think you'd feel really inadequate where you have failed to provide that service, where you have so much information but you are failing to just take it out to the people. So it puts you in a position where you may even get frustrated along the way because who wants to be that journalist that is being told what to do and how to do things? It doesn't work like that. When it comes to a democracy like ours, the freedom of the press plays a central role because the media is the fourth estate, like I mentioned already. But how well they perform that function is also dependent on how much freedom they are given to practice. So it's a two way thing really and where that freedom is not entirely existent but it's just existing in part then it becomes a little difficult for one to say the role of the press as the forces state is being dispensed. I mean it's being discharged in a way that it should. So ultimately the consequences out of that are that you have a bulk of uninformed citizens that are not following what's going on in their country that will be not even participating adequately in certain decision making processes because they don't have that much information.

**[00:48:27.680] - Speaker 1**

Even when you have certain discourse that touches on their life because they don't have a lot of information, then it becomes difficult for them to take part. So it becomes a one sided thing where only those that are in power will be able to do certain things and let certain decisions just go on like that without having to be questioned. It also affects the aspect of transparency which is key and expected of those that are in control of government resources. So where there is inadequate information because the generals are not able to freely report, then everybody else will be at liberty to do whatever wrong because they know that they don't have a strong press that is able to follow things and demand transparency and accountability. Because either way when you are in charge of a public office, you are accountable to the people. But when you have a weak press which is intimidated and lacks the freedom that it ought to have, then they will not manage to ensure that take you to account and ensure that there is audit transparency that is required for you to properly conduct yourself in a public office.

**[00:49:55.760] - Speaker 2**

How can newsrooms protect genetics? I know you've touched a bit on.

**[00:50:00.020] - Speaker 1**

It, but maybe you can. Yeah. How can newsrooms protect genesis? Newsrooms are run by the editors and then the editors most times are usually answerable to the owners of those particular organizations. Now you need, number one, a strong editor that understands the needs of their newsroom. I talked about the remuneration part. That's key. That's really important. But secondly also is to ensure that an editor speaks out on behalf of their journalists in these newsrooms and does not allow anybody to intimidate the justice. For instance, an editor should not I'm trying to find the best term to use, but maybe for lack of a better term, sell out. Maybe a journalist or there's something that has been done and somebody comes very annoyed and the editor will be the first one to say, oh, it's reporter A that did this story. You don't do that. You expect the editors to understand and know that they are the authority that's answerable for everything and anything that is published by the organization so that they can adequately protect the newsroom. So if there's anything that anybody has against a publication or the registration or television station that ought to be sorted out by the editor, unless it gets to a point where maybe it goes to court, then everybody else that has an interest in it will be cited in that particular matter.

**[00:52:02.750] - Speaker 1**

But outside that. The best would be to have somebody strong enough to understand what their role is as an editor, so that they know that they are not only gatekeeping the soil, they

are also ensuring that their newsrooms are protected from any external influences or external attacks and ensuring that their newsrooms are well taken care of in terms of remuneration. Ensuring that their newsrooms are also provided with all the necessary tools for them to operate without any hindrances. And also they are operating in a safe environment internally and externally as well. So those are key things really, for newsroom to operate smoothly. Without that, it becomes very difficult when someone is disjointed and they are not really sure and they don't have their hands on the newsroom, so they wouldn't even know who is doing what. And it becomes really dangerous because the reporters may be doing their own things that are actually mimical to the existence of the organization. Okay.

**[00:53:14.670] - Speaker 2**

We've talked about how much journalists offer information to citizens and how they help people to make decisions. I want to find out how can the citizens support and support press freedom in this country?

**[00:53:35.140] - Speaker 1**

They need to speak up. I know that we have always been speaking on our own, mostly, you recall. I'll give you an example of the time the post was closed. Of course a few came up, but it was only a matter of days before people went quiet and it became a battle for nobody else but just the posts alone. There has to be some effort made for people to understand that there's a huge role that the journalists play in their lives whereby if a journalist, for instance, is attacked today, that should not be an issue of the particular journalist, the media organization they represent and the media organizations that exist to speak for them. This should be an issue that should make society rise and demand that there has to be safety provided for the journalists if someone has been attacked. There has to be demand that whoever has perpetrated such against the genesis arrested and prosecuted using the existing laws of our country. So there's a lot, actually, that we need to do. Because when you look at what is happening right now, it's like nobody really cares much about what happens to a journalist.

**[00:55:00.580] - Speaker 1**

But they're forgetting that there's so much that happens, and that has been done by the journalists such that if you woke up one day and discover that there's no newspaper on the road, there's no registration that's giving you the news, it would be a very strange society. I would probably say maybe that should be tried one of these days and then we see. But then maybe that's when that's going to be a wake up call and people realize that there's a lot of work that the journalists do such that their participation in ensuring that their freedoms are respected and accorded to them can only happen otherwise. It's a pity that journalists are left to fight for themselves and yet they fight for everybody else. When it comes to maybe

all poor remuneration, the generalists will be all over writing stories about how Company A has not been doing the correct things that are against the laws and ABCD. But when it comes to them, it's very difficult for them to speak for themselves. And what happens there, that's when now you require the people in our society to stand up and speak on our behalf because they know that look, it's very difficult sometimes to speak about something that concerns you or something that affects you.

**[00:56:25.290] - Speaker 1**

So let's do it for the journalists. I think that will make a lot more sense but without having to make them understand the bulk of work that the generalists do, then we'll continue the status quo. But I hope that one of these days we can just shift a little bit and begin to let the people know and understand that there's a lot that the journalists do that requires their support and not little support, in fact 100% support so that they continue existing.

**[00:56:57.700] - Speaker 2**

What does the future look like for journalists in this country? Do you think conditions will improve or continue to decline?

**[00:57:08.680] - Speaker 1**

It's a 50 50 thing, really. Like I mentioned, there's quite a lot that needs to be done. And I think the starting point is to begin to have those conversations around the future of our industry. What exactly do we want from it? When you look at the aspect of practice, of course, some interventions are being put in place in terms of training and retraining, which ourselves are doing in collaboration with a number of colleagues like Panos Misa and several others that are in the industry and trying to bridge that gap for ourselves as Free Press initiative. What we have done is to have long term well, not really long term as in like, for three, four years, but something that will be done over a period of at least not less than six, seven months. So if we're going to say we would train you in investigative reporting, it's something that will not be done in two days, we have changed the forecast because we know that right now, I think the future of journalism really lies on investigative reporting, which is an area that anybody else cannot do. It only requires a trained journalist to handle an investigative story.

**[00:58:38.920] - Speaker 1**

So we are concentrating so much on that. And our focus are those journalists that are in practice and of a certain age group, the young ones, so that we can give them as much capacity as possible. And like I mentioned, it's over a period of about eight months or so. Most of our programs are tailored in that format. So through that, there's the theory part that is administered. And there's also a lot of practical. In fact, about three quarters of it is

all practical, and they come up with real stories. And those stories that are done under the project are published by their media organizations. So that's how serious we are looking at it. We don't want anything academic like, oh, do an investigative story and it ends in our meeting places. No. So we're talking about coming up with real investigative stories that are going to be published in their respective institutions. So that's one area, really, that we are looking at, and we are not just talking about it. Like I mentioned earlier, we identify the problems that are there, and as an organization, we try to come up with solutions. We're only doing a small part for now.

**[01:00:02.000] - Speaker 1**

The need is so huge, but because of limited funding and we're only a new organization that's only been in existence for four years, plus we're ten in five years this July, so we're still pretty new. We cannot be compared to others that have been existing for quite a long time. So funding is still a problem for us. So hopefully we can reach a point where we will be able to cover a bulk of all the generatives that are hungry for this particular information. The need is there, but the only restricting part is these resources that we require, like you know, investigative reporting is not cheap. So what we do in these projects is we give them some little funding, actually. So it's not about us just teaching them. We also give them little funding to enable them carry out their projects because they need money. And most of the organizations where they come from may not even pay any attention to investigative reporting. So you go with a budget and say, oh, I need 6000 quatcha, which is roughly about $300 thereabouts to investigate, to investigate a story. They will look at what that $300 would do to an entire institution and just say, no, come on, forget about that story.

**[01:01:21.320] - Speaker 1**

So we're saying let them realize how important these investigative pieces are by helping you out. First, train you, then number two, support whatever projects you have by giving you all those little fundings that you require for you to do these stories. But with time, I'm very hopeful that things will change and it will see us grow into an institution that we want the FBI to be, which becomes like a center of excellence for journalism where we can do quite a lot more than what we are doing right now. So the future for journalism is still there. All we need to do is just to put some of those issues that I've identified into play, do what ought to be done in terms of training and retraining, having a lot of talks with them at whatever opportunity that arises. And also looking at the other side, which is remuneration where the people that own these media organizations begin to appreciate the role of the journalists and then they start to remunerate them appropriately, then I think that will really save us from where we are.

**[01:02:35.040] - Speaker 2**

The last one. What does press freedom mean to you?

**[01:02:41.940] - Speaker 1**

What does press freedom mean to me? Well, it means a lot as a gender, this face. Press freedom means I should be able to collect information. I should be able to package my information and disseminate it without fear of anything, without fear that anybody will come for me once I publish this story. Without fear that the laws will come for me because I've published this particular story. So I should be given the space to operate without any hindrance, in short, coming from individuals or the laws. To me, I think that's what press freedom means. I should have the free access to information and I should also be able to communicate by having my information published without any trouble or fear of reprisals.

**[01:03:55.420] - Speaker 2**

Thank you so much, Madame Chira, for this interview.

**[01:03:59.600] - Speaker 1**

Thank you.